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GENERAL SESSIONS—PAPERS

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

By AZARIAH S. ROOT, *Librarian, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio*

FIRST GENERAL SESSION

The great war is over and now the statesmen of the world are puzzling over the question "Who shall pay for it"? For many of the European nations with currency depreciated and manhood shattered this is proving an almost insolvable problem. To the United States, however, with a stable currency and with its manhood relatively unimpaired, the problem presents a different angle. Although the United States has emerged from the war with enormous credits and with a large part of the world's stock of gold, she has obtained the money to carry on the war and to aid her allies by a large issue of tax-exempt securities. She finds, therefore, that the property subject to taxation has only moderately increased while the expenses which are to be paid from the funds obtained by taxation have been nearly doubled because of the increase in commodity costs and the necessary increases in salaries. Moreover, there will be strong opposition to any further increase of taxation since from the tax paying portion of the community there is a vigorous demand that taxation be reduced. To do this, however, is well nigh impossible without restoring salaries to a pre-war basis and this seems impossible unless commodity costs can be placed upon a pre-war basis.

The public officials responsible for the spending of money raised by taxation, confronting on the one hand demands for increases in taxes and on the other hand the impossibility of reduced taxation, turn now here, now there, in a vain attempt to solve their insolvable problem. In this emergency there comes to the front the so-called "practical" men who have an easy solution of the problem: "Cut out the frills," and this interpreted means in education go back to the days when reading, writing and arithmetic only were taught. In charities go back to the day when simple doles were given out and no attempt was made to reach and remove the causes of poverty.

In library work it results in a cry to curtail work with the children, to cut out the story hour, eliminate all newer methods which attract and interest the readers; in short, go back to the days when handing out a book was considered all there was to do in library work. Now it is not necessary to attempt to refute these so-called practical men on this occasion. My purpose tonight is rather to discuss what the library profession can do to make sure that the legitimate demand for library maintenance which is made of the public has been reduced to the lowest amount consistent with the place of the library in the general scheme of taxation. Other groups—the schools, the public institutions, the public sanitary forces, the charitable departments—all these are also demanding an increased tax rate. Is there anything that we as librarians can do to lighten the burden of the tax payer without sacrificing those professional methods which the development of recent years has made possible? I invite you therefore to look for a few minutes at an extremely practical problem which has been in theory, at least, constantly before the A. L. A., for in the beginning the A. L. A. accepted for its motto: "The best reading, for the largest number, at the least cost."

I shall not discuss the question whether it is possible to increase the amount received from taxation. This is to be discussed at length in one of the meetings of the Trustees Section. Nor shall I discuss the question whether those salaries raised during the war because of the increased cost of living should be restored to their pre-war status? All students of comparative salaries seem agreed that before the war teachers and librarians were not receiving their due share of compensation as compared with other departments of labor. I shall assume, therefore, that no one wishes to see salaries go back to the pre-war basis. Go back the salaries will, however, unless we can increase the income from public taxation

or can curtail our work in some direction or unless there can be found by a careful study of our methods quicker and less expensive ways of carrying out our library activities.

Every librarian holding an administrative position or responsibility is faced with the tremendous and steadily mounting cost of library administration, and yet so far as I know few have really faced the question of making a careful systematic survey of their methods to see whether the expense of operation can be reduced. We librarians are as a rule extremely individualistic. Each library has devised its own methods and in spite of the constant discussion of library methods many librarians are still continuing to do as they always have done. The original method may not have been the best one possible. It may not have accomplished the results at the least possible expense or with the least expenditure of time, but there it is, and there it has been for years, and it is thought easier to let it continue than to attempt an improvement whereby the expense of operation can be reduced. Moreover as a library grows bigger the difficulty in changing its methods constantly increases.

Therefore in spite of all that has been done by means of library papers, conventions, library periodicals and the discussions of the A. L. A. there is still the greatest diversity in the methods employed in our libraries. And in many of our libraries there still exists great ignorance and even great indifference as to the methods used in other libraries. The library schools which endeavor to perform the function through their courses in library economy of describing the various methods used and pointing out their good and weak points are still far too theoretical in their treatment of library methods. From time to time some new method is exploited by its originator, presented in state or national meetings, adopted here and there spasmodically by individual libraries, while the great majority go on and on in the same path which they have been pursuing for years. Therefore, as the first preliminary to a systematic reorganization of library methods we need the proposed Library Survey originally suggested at the second Asbury Park meeting by President Bishop and since slowly being developed

by the Committee on Library Service. I say this as a *first* requisite because before changing our methods we shall need to know what is actually being done elsewhere. At the present time, whenever any proposal of change comes up no one has any basis for knowing just what is now being done. A questionnaire hurriedly prepared is sent out to a great number of libraries, which hurriedly answer it, giving part but often not all of the facts in the situation, and from these answers a hurried conclusion is compiled which having been duly presented, sinks into oblivion as have many of its predecessors.

We greatly need a work which shall sum up and indicate the methods adopted in actual practice by each library in the handling of a book from the time it is ordered until it is available for readers. The Library of Congress in the manual accompanying its report for 1901 gave an extremely useful and fairly complete account of its methods. Mr. Dana in his book *Modern American library economy, as illustrated by the Newark, New Jersey, Free Public Library* has done the same for his library. A number of university librarians have prepared manuals for use by their clientele which have attempted something in this direction, but after all these are isolated instances and there is great need of a manual which shall enable any one who has to face the problem of improving or altering the methods of his own library to see in tabular form exactly what is being done by other libraries. Such knowledge I believe can be obtained through the proposed survey. It can be secured however only by the co-operation of every librarian and by the painstaking and honest filling out of what would prove to be a mammoth questionnaire.

When the great Inter-Church World Movement was laying out its plan of work it contemplated among other things a very extensive survey of the methods adopted by colleges. An elaborate questionnaire was compiled and sent out to every college and university of the country. I happen to know that the secretary of the institution with which I am connected spent the greater part of three months in gathering together the information which was desired. **Owing to the**

collapse of the Inter-Church World Movement very little has resulted from all this work, but I know that in my own institution this work is not at all regarded as a waste of time, but is again and again proving of the greatest value. I believe such will prove to be the case with the contemplated library survey when it has been carried through and the data gotten together and published. It may be necessary to have a series of volumes that will cover the ground topically as was done in the case of the Cleveland School Survey but if so I feel that it will prove to be one of the most valuable additions to library economy which American libraries have ever added to their shelves. With the publication of the results of this survey it ought to be perfectly possible for any library to make a comparison of its methods with those adopted by other libraries and thus eliminate waste of effort, unnecessary labor and unwise expenditure. A multitude of library questionnaires would be answered in such a publication and the organized tabulation of results would make it a relatively simple matter to see what was being done by other libraries.

As an example of what may result from such a survey let me call your attention to the so-called "cataloging test" which was undertaken by the Catalog Section some years ago. This brought together data showing that the cost of cataloging a book varied greatly, ranging from fifty cents to two dollars, in different institutions. I know of at least one case where the results disclosed by this test have led to a careful examination of every process through which a book passes, resulting in a very considerable reduction in the total amount. The amount remaining, however, still seems greater than it should be and it ought to be one of the happy results of the survey to suggest methods by which the cost may be still further reduced. This would lead to another step in the direction of economy which it seems to me must sooner or later come about, namely, the standardization of the methods employed by the great majority of our libraries.

Anyone familiar with the files of the *Library Journal* knows how strongly this need was felt by those who first organized the A. L. A. The Co-operation Committee, as

it was called, busied itself for ten years in establishing the practice for accession books, for the size of cards, as to catalog rules, as to blanks for the order department, reference department, and similar subjects. In fact the great majority of the methods we have in common were wrought out in the first ten years of the American Library Association by such men as Cutter, Dewey, Winsor and others. In recent years we have depended largely upon the library schools and upon discussion at library meetings to keep us informed as to methods and to bring about a standardization of action. This has proved insufficient. For this standardization we must await the result of the survey but when this is available it seems to me that it would be perfectly feasible to so standardize the methods of the greater majority of libraries that an assistant changing from one library to another should find herself after the first week able to work in the new position as easily as she did in her previous one.

When one considers the great number of changes that occur in a single year in the library world, the economy resulting from such standardization is evident. I am aware that there are those among us who talk about the danger of standardization and fear that the libraries will lose individual initiative if these are introduced. And yet these very people are among the first to complain that the library schools do not prepare for the practical operations of library work. Yet if these operations could be standardized, the task of the library schools would be greatly simplified and time and strength would be available to teach more important matters.

One of our ablest critics said not long ago that libraries had very little influence in shaping the reading of their communities. If this be true, is it not time that we standardize the mechanical parts of our work and throw all our energies into the task of really making our libraries an effective force in transforming their communities?

Another respect in which there seems to be great possibility of saving is in the line of co-operative publication. During the last year the Secretary of the A. L. A. has been making some very interesting experiments in this direction. The short reading list of *Boys'*

books, for example, was found to be of such practical value that 160,000 copies were ordered by a very considerable number of libraries. Sixty-five thousand copies of the list of *Children's books for Christmas presents* were sold last winter. With a well organized force such as is necessary for the issue of the *Booklist* and with hearty co-operation from a great many libraries, there seems to be very great possibilities in preparing such lists to be sold at a minimum cost to the individual libraries.

Without trying to enter upon the discussion of tomorrow in which this whole subject of publications is to be fully presented, I suggest that one of the most useful services we could render would be to make the A. L. A. office a sort of clearing house for the bibliographical accomplishments of our libraries. In many cases is it not a fact that some rather difficult and puzzling problem as to the duration of a serial or as to the authorship of a work published under an assumed name has been brought to a complete solution by the painstaking efforts of the reference librarian of some one of our larger libraries, and then having served its immediate purpose this knowledge is allowed to lie unutilized because unpublished while perhaps some other librarian a few months later may have occasion to patiently and painstakingly work out the very same problem?

If all such work done by our larger libraries was submitted in a written form to the A. L. A. headquarters, mimeographed or printed, and distributed to such other libraries as would pay an annual subscription for such information, might not a notable co-operation in effort and a great economy in expenditures be the ultimate result? Those of us who have again and again benefited by Mr. Faxon's notes in the *Bulletin of Bibliography* in regard to alterations in the time and place of publication of some serial would appreciate it if many more such notes would be available each year.

Then, also, the possibility of providing by co-operative effort working tools which are now lacking seems very great. One has only to recall the original *Poole's Index* and the supplementary volumes as well; the *A. L. A.*

index of collective material; the *A. L. A. portrait index* and other similar publications,—all the result of such co-operation,—to see what possibilities there are in this form of effort. Dr. Richardson of Princeton at a recent meeting of the American Library Institute has made some extremely interesting suggestions as to further work in this direction which might well be given careful consideration.

A pressing problem which is generally realized, but which nobody has solved, is the problem of utilizing the duplicate material in the possession of our libraries. Nobody has discovered a simple and inexpensive way of transferring such material from the place where it is not needed to the place where it will be of service. In a large library the cost of searching to see whether the items on a list of duplicates offered are needed is so great as to be almost prohibitive, and the majority of libraries find it easier to sell their duplicates to some second hand book dealer who patiently catalogs it and offers the material at fancy prices to other libraries. These purchase it because it is the only way by which at present they can acquire the desired book. Again and again suggestions have been made for some great central clearing house to which all duplicate material should be sent and from which there should be issued lists for selection, but nobody has ever seemed to devise any way of meeting the expenses for this colossal undertaking.

Various libraries have been making experiments in this line and some of them seem worthy of mention at this point. One method quite frequently adopted is the preparation of a want list which is sent out to libraries which will co-operate. This method is very fruitful and would be exceedingly so if all libraries would list their duplicates and so know what they could supply. For those libraries which have taken the trouble to list and make available their duplicates, lists like this have proved a way of obtaining important additions at very little expense. The recipient of the list knows what he can furnish and by reference to his catalog of duplicates is able to send a prompt answer, and the aggregate result very often means the completion of a difficult society publication or periodical set.

Another method which is now being tried by a number of libraries is the issuing of a monthly list of available duplicates and sending this to those libraries which are willing to co-operate in like fashion. The use of the mimeograph has made the cost of such lists a trifling sum, and they have resulted in very large and profitable exchange relations. I have sent out some forty or more such lists with the result that at least nine-tenths of the material offered has been taken by some one of the libraries receiving the list. From some of these I have not as yet received anything in exchange, but I have the satisfaction of knowing that the material was of use somewhere and that some time I shall get a return from the libraries which have selected this material. The cost has been relatively little and the returns in books selected from similar lists have abundantly justified the expense. The real difficulty in the development of this method lies in the unwillingness or inability of many libraries to provide lists of their duplicate material. All of us owe a great debt to the Library of Congress and to the New York Public Library for the very generous additions we have received from them through such lists, an obligation which we are endeavoring to repay as rapidly as we may.

There are many other examples which might be given through which an increase of efficiency may be secured without an increase in the cost of administration. We have talked very little about the possibilities of collective purchasing, or of a combination whereby a competent and efficient "replacement" man might be employed in each large city, to meet the constantly increasing de-

mand from libraries for such service. We have no organization whereby the need of libraries for a reprint of some important out-of-print work can be tabulated and pressure brought upon the publisher to issue a new edition, nor have we any machinery to prevent the issue of faked new editions to be foisted upon the libraries. All these and many others I must pass over and confine my illustrations to one more concrete example.

1. Do we all need to buy everything? With the enormously increased production of books, must we not work out some co-operative arrangement whereby the field of purchase shall be more thoroughly covered, by a division of purchase among the libraries of a state or of a city?

2. Do we all need to keep all the books we now have? Cannot the older and less frequently called for books be brought together in one or two libraries of a state, which shall act as a reservoir, relieving libraries generally of the expense of keeping material little in demand, and thus reducing maintenance and overhead for many others?

These examples must suffice to make clear the position I am trying to establish. In the face of increasing demands upon the public purse, it is time for a careful review of all our methods, time for a systematic survey of all our resources, time for co-operative combinations for more effective results. The great need of American libraries today is that each library should think not in terms of itself and its own interests, but in the spirit and with the conception of library unity. Each must be ready to give and each ready to take whatever action will be for the greatest good of all our American libraries.

REETING TO THE ASSOCIATION

By ADAM STROHM, *Librarian Detroit Public Library*

FIRST GENERAL SESSION

From near and far, even from distant parts outside the United States borders, delegates of the American Library Association are journeying along routes converging toward Detroit, for their forty-fourth annual conclave in the furthering of a great educational and social movement. The heartiest greetings are extended to these visitors by the City

of Detroit, deeply conscious of the honor conferred upon it by the presence of these guests.

The affection for and pride in their city on the part of all its citizens allow us to feel that this event is a tribute paid to our city as a whole for its natural attractions, its spirit of enterprise, its achievements, its honorable